

God's household

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[0 : 00] My name is Pastor Brian, and this morning we're actually at the end of a little mini-series in 1 Timothy chapter 3 where we've been looking at elders and deacons because in our church life, in the season where we are choosing our new leaders, but we've now come to the end of the series and the end of 1 Timothy chapter 3 this morning.

So can I encourage you to keep your Bibles open? Again, there will be an outline in your bulletin as well, which you can use to help you track along with the sermon if that helps. But make sure that the Bible is also open in front of you.

Let me pray. Father, I ask once again that indeed you will help us this morning as we look at your word to help us know how to live as your church, the church of the living God.

Would you help us to be able to fulfill our purposes and more importantly fulfill your purposes in this world so that all may come to know the Lord Jesus.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now if you were to stop the average person on the street in Kuching and ask them, what is church? What is church for?

[1 : 28] I wonder what they would say. I imagine that you would get a range of responses. For some, I imagine that they'll think of church a bit like a museum.

You know what museums are like? They're often housed in nice ancient looking buildings. And you'll be happy to take your family there once in a while. It could be a nice way to spend a Sunday. You'll probably learn something interesting. And you'll be glad that it's there as a reminder of the past. But you would never think of going there week after week. And it probably won't impact your day-to-day life much.

For others, the church is a means of charity. So again, they're probably glad that the church is around as a place where food sales maybe can happen to help the poor.

Some pastors are around to counsel the downhearted. And some welfare programs can be run. And actually, if you were to read the Bono Post over the period of a year and make a note of every time a local politician talks about church, you would soon notice that this is exactly what many of them believe.

[2 : 47] There's Cheshire Home. There's WWF. And there's the church. They all belong to the same category as a means to do charity.

Still others might be convinced that the church is the moral conscience of society. Its role is to safeguard certain values and standards that we hold dear.

So depending on what you believe the biggest social threat of the day is, you might want the church to consistently speak out against eroding standards of personal morality or political corruption and social injustice.

And that's what some people think church is for. And perhaps still others don't think with such high ideals. For them, church is simply a meeting place for shared interests.

So maybe choir is your thing. And so church is a great place to meet people who like to sing in choirs. Or perhaps being a retiree is a place where you can get involved in the seniors group and meet others at the same stage of life.

[4 : 03] Now those are some possible answers. And it's very possible that some of us this morning have similar thoughts. Now each of those answers might have some grain of truth.

There's a place carefully conceived for church as charity, as conscience, as common ground.

But if we were to ask not just the average man on the street, but God himself, what would he say? For he is the one person whose opinion we should value the most. In the end, it's his definition that matters.

And so this morning, that's what we're going to explore from 1 Timothy 3 verses 14 to 16. According to God, what is church for?

[5 : 02] But just before we address that question, explore that question, let's ask why is this question important to address? You see, this morning we're finishing up our series on elders, deacons, and God's household.

But why didn't we just stop with elders and deacons? Since that's where we are as a church, about to choose elders and deacons for the next few years. Well, it's quite simple.

If we don't know God's purposes for his church, then we might not understand what elders and deacons are to prioritize. If we don't know what church is for, then we might get upset if church doesn't do what we think church should do.

But if we know what God's purposes for his church is, if we know his criteria, if we know what church is for, biblically speaking, then we can all work together towards the same goal, support our leaders as they strive to help us carry out God's purposes, and hold our leaders accountable. And the reverse is also true. They can hold us accountable. And more than that, as we'll see in a moment, we can bless the world.

[6 : 31] So let's turn to this little section in 1 Timothy 3, verse 14 to 16 today. And what we'll do is we will craft a purpose statement of sorts from this section.

So we'll slowly build a statement in three parts, so that by the end of this morning, I hope that it's crystal clear why we exist.

So let's begin. And where I want to begin is not with purpose, but with identity. Because our purpose flows from our identity.

Now I'm sure some of you have watched the Oscar-winning film, Chariots of Fire, based on the true story of the Olympic athlete, Eric Little. And in that movie, he has this famous line where he says, I believe God made me for a purpose.

God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure. So he saw himself as one born to run.

[7 : 41] And run he did, all the way to Olympic gold. His purpose flowed from his identity. And it's the same for us.

Notice how we are described in these verses. Come with me, first of all, to the end of verse 15. And look at how Paul describes us. We are, he says, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Now when we think of church, I doubt very much that this is the first picture that comes to mind. Church as charity, church as community, church as body, maybe those are all slightly more familiar images.

But church as pillar and foundation? It sounds like we're saying that church is like concrete. Such an image doesn't exactly inspire warm feelings in our hearts.

But think, for instance, of something like the Tugu Nagara. Here's a picture of it on the screen. So the Tugu Nagara, of course, is a monument to remember those who struggled for Malaysia's freedom during the Japanese occupation.

[8 : 57] And what it shows are five soldiers on top of a pillar, brandishing a Malaysian flag, tending to the wounded, and so on. And what the pillar is doing is holding these soldiers up.

It's saying, look at them, honour them, magnify them, remember their sacrifice. But what is the church holding up?

Well, Paul says, we are the pillar and foundation of the truth. Again, that sounds like another imposing and pompous race.

The truth. Capital T. Sounds very exclusive. Like some secret, special knowledge, only for a select few.

But a glance at the wider context of 1 Timothy soon tells us that it's the opposite. Turn back with me just one chapter to 1 Timothy 2, verse 3 and 4 for a moment.

[10 : 07] Now notice what God wants. He wants, verse 4, all people to be safe and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

And there's no restriction on who can hear this truth. There's no subscription fee to pay to access this truth. This truth is for everybody.

And what is this truth? Well, we find out in verse 5. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

And so this truth is about God sending his only son, Jesus, into the midst of those who never wanted a relationship with God, though they might be intensely religious, as Jews and Greeks were.

it's about him acting as a peacemaker to people like us who politely tell God, please leave the room, we don't want you up close in our lives, we want you far, far away.

[11 : 22] And it's about him paying the price to become the sacrificial lamb in our place. And it's all about Jesus.

And the church is to constantly hold Jesus up. They put him on display. They say to the world, look at Christ, remember his sacrifice, honour him, and follow him.

And so the church is not just holding up a statement of belief on paper. The church is not just holding up abstract ethical principles. The church is not even waving a banner that says, ha ha ha, we know what's true and you guys don't, as if we're holding up a trophy that says that we're the winners.

No. We're holding up a person that we love. Because if he's our saviour, we would love him. And we would naturally want him to be known.

Wells Crowther was an investment banker working on the 104th floor of the World Trade Center when September 11 happened. He helped to organise and evacuate people.

[12 : 44] and he famously carried one woman on his back down 17 floors before he went back up the stairs to help others.

He was wearing a distinctive red bandana wrapped around his nose and his mouth to keep himself protected from the smoke. And in the process of doing all that, he gave up his life so that at least ten people would be saved.

And as a result, his family has established the Wells Crowther Foundation to honour his act of salvation, to inspire leadership and character, and to hold him up to others.

They want his name to be known. And God himself establishes the church as the Jesus Foundation so that his name be known.

For he's not just any person. He's the saviour of the world. He's not just a memory to be honoured. He's a living person that we can relate to right now.

[13 : 57] And so we showcase him. We put him on display. We hold him up as pillars and foundations of Jesus for that's our identity and that's our purpose.

So, imagine a visitor coming to visit our church for the first time without any prior knowledge of KEC. When they look at us, can they see Jesus?

When they listen in on our conversations, is it clear to them that Jesus is the most precious thing to us? When they see how we treat our Bibles, is it clear to them that we think that Jesus' words are wonderful and life-giving?

When they see the decisions we make, is it obvious that we make them because we want Jesus above all to be lifted high in coaching and beyond?

Is it obvious that we desperately want to offer Jesus as the greatest, most valuable treasure we have to the world? Or would they see that we are holding up something else?

[15 : 15] Would they see that we are pillars and foundation of general morals, or social respectability, or religious performance?

Would they come away thinking we value Jesus or ourselves more? What are we lifting up for the world to see?

You see, the world desperately needs us to hold up Jesus. For without Jesus, the entire world is entirely lost.

They will remain trapped in a cycle of broken relationships, meaningless pursuits, empty lies. and they may not even realise it.

But God has given us this unique privilege of telling them good news, that Jesus can redeem them from such lostness.

[16 : 15] After all, the non-governmental organisations won't be telling the world about Jesus. The charitable bodies won't be telling the world about Jesus. The social commentators won't be telling the world about Jesus.

It has to be us. And so that's the first part of our purpose statement today. God's church puts Jesus on display.

God's church puts Jesus on display. Whatever else we do, that's totally non-negotiable. Now, that's not to say that it's going to be easy.

That's not to say it won't be a struggle. We fully acknowledge that. But what we're asking is for us to journey together, to ask our leaders to equip us, so that we can strive with all our awe, all of us

together, whether we're elders, deacons, members of the congregation, so that we can best put him on display as one church.

And from 1 Timothy, there is one way in particular that we put Jesus on display. The clue is in the other way that we're described here.

[17:38] Notice in verse 15, we are also described as God's household. God's household. And so God is describing the church, not so much in terms of a sacred building where we have to maintain some sort of solemnity.

Rather, he's describing the people who make up the community of the church. And he describes this community as a household, in other words, a family.

And so what binds us together is not so much that we all like sports or gardening or the same kind of food. What binds us together is that we're children of the same living God.

We are the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Our heavenly father is the same. And so we're spiritual siblings.

We're family. And notice that family language is there throughout 1 Timothy. We saw a couple of weeks ago that elders are described as those who must manage his own family well.

[18:51] Why? Because elders also must take care of God's household, God's family. In one sense, they act a little bit like the spiritual fathers or older brothers in God's family.

And when we turn to somewhere else like 1 Timothy 5, verses 1 to 2, we notice that Paul urges us to treat others like family as well. Just turn with me 1 Timothy 5, verses 1 and 2.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with absolute purity.

There you have it. We're God's household. We're family members together. Now, we can choose our friends, but we don't get to choose family.

We certainly don't get to choose whom God decides to save. But we do choose how we treat one another. And as family, what we do is we accept one another, we welcome each other, we eat with one another, and we long for one another to love Jesus more.

[20:12] And when the world sees family like that on display, they see Jesus on display. They see the saviour who wants all kinds of people to be safe, on display.

I read an article just after the Sri Lanka bombings in which the journalist made a striking observation. After noting the traditional divide in Sri Lankan society between the majority Sinhalis and the minority Tamils, he had this just one line where he said, oh, and the church is the one place where you find both groups together.

How striking. What a visible demonstration of the truth that God wants all people to be safe. And we display the truth concretely when different kinds of people come together in God's household and treat each other as family.

And so that's why Paul is very concerned in verse 15 that people ought to know how to conduct themselves in God's household. That's the main reason he's writing to Timothy.

When we are ungodly, it's a big turn-off to the world. But when we're godly, we help people see that this truth is something worth looking into.

[21:49] And in fact, when we're godly towards other people who are not like us, we're being like Jesus. Because Jesus himself is a magnet for broken people.

and sinners who know they need God. And so if we're truly holding out Jesus, we would treat such people the way he does. With compassion, with patience, with love.

We are living out the truth we say we believe in. After all, a healthy church would actually attract all sorts of people who would not be healthy in all sorts of ways.

Socially awkward people, emotionally broken people, and so on. That's a mark of a healthy church when we actually attract unhealthy people. Because that's exactly what Jesus did.

These people, when they come, they not only hear the message of grace, but they see the message of grace. Godly conduct look like?

[23:06] We see some clues from 1 Timothy as a whole. From 1 Timothy chapter 5, it shows up in how we treat the vulnerable, particularly the widows in our midst.

Paul says if the widows have no biological family of their own whom they can fall back upon, well, the church must become like family to them. And he wants us to take care of them.

And of course, as we heard last week, that's one of the roles of the deacons, to help us to do that the best we can. In 1 Timothy chapter 5, it also shows up in the way we treat our leaders.

Let me just read to you from verses 18 to 19. For scripture says, do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker deserves his wages.

Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. And so Paul is saying, treat your leaders fairly, whether that be financially or if they are being slandered.

[24 : 13] That's another example of godly conduct. Elsewhere in 1 Timothy, Paul tells us being godly includes certain characteristics, like the ones that we've been seeing over the last two weeks.

It would include being gentle with one another, being hospitable to one another, not acting greedily at the expense of others, and persevering in the faith together.

But let me just zoom in on one specific example from 1 Timothy of godly conduct in church. And let me just give you the negative side of it first.

what does it look like to be an ungodly church, according to Paul here? It's when we become interested in everything except the main point of church, Jesus.

In 1 Timothy 1 verse 3, we discover that there are false teachers at work in the church, promoting what Paul calls myths and endless genealogies.

[25 : 21] and then down in chapter 1 verse 6, he says that they have turned to meaningless talk. In 1 Timothy chapter 6, these false teachers, Paul says, have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels.

And Paul says he doesn't want God's household to follow the example of these teachers, only being interested in trivialities and nonsense, forwarding each other WhatsApp messages about nothing in particular, and having little interest in journeying together to know Jesus.

But what's the antidote? Well, here's the positive side of the coin. A church that is godly, Paul says, and that won't go the way of the false teachers, is one that prays.

Have a look at 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1, and this comes after Paul has just described the way of the false teachers.

I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

[26 : 49] So we have to pray for all people, including, but not restricted to those in authority. But notice, the purpose of such prayer is so that we can be godly in our conduct.

Just look again at the end of verse 2. Let me just read from the beginning, actually. For kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

And that's why we pray. When we become distracted from our main purpose of displaying Jesus to the world, you can be sure that's because we are not praying together.

But when we pray together in this way, it actually reminds and reorients us back towards what is most important, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And indeed, in chapter 2, verse 8, Paul says that the men are to lead the way in prayer. So can I encourage us all, please do make praying together a priority in our church life.

[27 : 59] At our recent prayer morning, I looked at some of the faces of the few who turned up, and although they tried to hide it, I saw the looks of sadness and disappointment when they realized that so few of us had turned up to talk to our heavenly father, and my heart broke for them.

We need to do better. And so that's the second part of our purpose statement for this morning.

God's church puts Jesus on display when they display godly conduct as God's family.

God's church puts Jesus on display when they display godly conduct as God's family. But that's not quite the end of the purpose statement yet.

Because we all know that families can be dysfunctional. Families can be places of hurt, places where we don't want to be, places that we wish we weren't part of.

And so it's important to remember this is no ordinary family. This is God's household. For the first readers of 1 Timothy, that phrase, God's household, would have reminded them of something else from the Old Testament.

[29 : 26] It would have reminded them of the house of God, whether that was the tabernacle in the wilderness or the temple in the days of King Solomon. God's presence.

God's presence. And it's where he showcases his grace, choosing to dwell with his sinful people.

And that's the church today. Sinners saved by grace who have God dwelling in our midst. peace.

The church is not some dead institution.

The church is alive with the presence of God. And so when we become part of God's household, yes, we bring our dysfunction into this family to some extent or another.

So we always need him. Without him, our dysfunction prevents us from displaying Jesus well. And we find ourselves having difficulty conducting ourselves in godly ways.

[30 : 38] But praise God, the living God remains at the heart of his living church. And so that's why in verse 16, Paul takes us back to the very heart of our faith, where God has made himself present to us in Christ.

Let me read verse 16. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

God's love. And those are rich words familiar to most of us. But let's not rush over them. And so let's take the remainder of our time to meditate on Christ.

He appeared in the flesh. Remember, this is the holy God himself, invisible and immortal.

But he came down and made himself visible. And having a real human body became mortal. And as human being, he breathed our air, felt our pain, knew our sorrows.

[32 : 10] And to say he appeared in the flesh shows us that God is not a nasty guy up there waiting to punish us at the slightest provocation. No, God has decided to come down for us and bear his own penalty due to us.

So great is his mercy. He was vindicated by the spirit. By the work of the spirit, though he was fully human, human corruption never touched him.

We know that because death, the punishment for sin has no hold over him. He rose again. And by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, Romans 1 4 tells us he was declared to be God's son, ruling over all.

He was seen by angels. That seems to be a reference to his resurrection appearances. They confirm the truth of who he is. But notice something.

when the resurrected Jesus first appeared to Mary, he was confused for a gardener. When the resurrected Jesus first appeared to the disciples on the seashore, he was confused for just another man cooking breakfast.

[33 : 32] When the resurrected Jesus first appeared to the two men going to Emmaus, he was confused for a wandering stranger. here, they all saw him, but apparently he didn't make a very strong first impression.

And that tells me Jesus doesn't simply overwhelm us with his presence. Look at me. I'm the king. Bow down to me.

Obey me. No, instead, he invites them and us to encounter the truth of who he is as he slowly opens their eyes.

He was seen by angels, but his exalted position never stops him humbly coming alongside his people. And so if this is who he is, well, no wonder he is to be preached amongst the nations.

This is the God whom we hold up. And as we hold him up to the world, there will be people who will come to trust in him. That's Paul's conviction.

[34 : 46] He was believed on in the world. And that's our conviction that when we invite people to something like Christianity Explored, when we have a meaningful conversation with somebody, when we display Jesus together as God's church, well, people will come to know and trust Jesus.

They will see the glory of the ascended Christ and bow down to him. So, what is church for?

I hope it's clear enough. It's so that we can put Jesus on display when we display godly conduct as God's household. And how can we accomplish that?

When we come back to the truths of verse 16. When we behold God's display of himself to us in Christ, true godliness begins to germinate and grow in us.

That's what verse 16 says. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. Well, that's the mystery of the faith.

[35 : 59] Jesus doesn't just save us. He transforms us into the family likeness. God's love in God's name. He uses ordinary people like us to bring honor to the family name.

And so we can now complete our purpose statement. God's church puts Jesus on display when we display godly conduct as God's family because God has first displayed himself to us in Christ.

God's church puts Jesus on display when we display godly conduct as God's family because God has first displayed himself to us in Christ.

And so that's why as a church we must remain gospel-centered if we want to keep our bearings as God's church. That's what we must encourage our elders and deacons to do.

And we should willingly follow their lead when they encourage us to. Because in the end, this is what the world really needs. They need to see Jesus.

[37 : 11] They need to see this truth to have life. And they need to see us living out this truth in our church life. And only then would they be blessed because they would know Jesus for themselves.

For that to happen, the church must be the church. It must be God's household. Last week, I mentioned the missionary scholar Leslie Nealbygen.

And let me end this morning with another piece of wisdom from him as one way of summarizing today's message. So here's his answer to the question. How can the church put Jesus on display? live in the kingdom of God in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the answer.

That's his reply. And that's what God's household is called to do. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[38 : 16] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you again for the Lord Jesus.

Thank you that he appeared in the flesh, that he was vindicated by the spirit, and he was seen by angels. And so we pray this morning that you would help us to be who you call us to be, God's household, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

And would you help us to hold the Lord Jesus up high so that the world will come to a knowledge of this truth. Would you help us not to be distracted from this one purpose, this one focus?

Help us not to get sidetracked into doing things that might be good in themselves, but do not ultimately serve your purposes. others. And so Lord, will you also help us, those of us who are leaders, to help us to ensure that the church keeps doing this for your glory.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen.